Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.
Editor: Michael P. Birks, 36 Trevor Road, Flixton, Manchester M41 5QH. England. 0161 747 5924.

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The Central American Group is a part of the Spanish Main Philatelic Society, the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is *The Mainsheet*, published quarterly, and is free with your subscription. The Secretary is Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, Peterborough PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 01733 2687078. The subscription is currently £8 in Europe or $20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling or US$ should be made payable to "The Spanish Main". A three year subscription of £21/$54 and a five year subscription of £30/$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining during the course of the year the appropriate part subscriptions should be added - Feb-Apr £6/$15; May-Aug £4/$10; Sep-Nov £2/$5 to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect.

The Central American Group caters for the collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £8/$15 resident in the UK or in Europe, or £11/$19 elsewhere. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining after June 1st, add 50% to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect. Cheques in sterling payable to "The CA Group" should be sent to the treasurer, David Hankey, 2 Prince's Drive, Marple, Stockport SK6 6NJ, England. Phone 0161-449 0693. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group for overseas members.

We regret we cannot accept dollar cheques for subscriptions because each cheque costs a minimum of £5/$8 to negotiate.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/$1.50 each, although Volumes 1 and 2 are sold out. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/$1.50 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable. Payments must be made in sterling or in dollar bills.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, 3 Reawla Lane, Reawla, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 5HQ, England.

The group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russell Court, St Lukes Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7AP, England. Phone 01628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion from them.

The auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested to do so.

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Vol.IV, No. 81 **<mpbirks@36trevor.freeserve.co.uk>** **October 2000**

EDITORIAL

Glasgow 2000 is almost upon us. For those who are unfamiliar with this show it is a biennial event supported by the Association of British Philatelic Societies and staged by a local Federation. The first was six years ago in Newcastle and that successful formula has been adopted and improved upon since. I mention this because I shall be a volunteer in Glasgow and I look forward to seeing some of you there.

After Glasgow will be **Chester 2002** for which planning is well under way. Based on Glasgow 2000, Chester will have several new innovations, one of which concerns me. My responsibility at this show will be the competitive entries and for the first time for many years a new class called "The Research Class" will be introduced as an experiment. The purpose of this class will be to allow those whose research into philately precludes them from competition because their entry is marked down through a lack of "importance". Importance will play no part in this class.

Medals will be awarded on the basis of personal research and if done well your Latin American entry will be able to knock a 1d black entry into 2nd place. So why not give it a try? How often does Latin America get a level playing field? Overseas competitors are welcome to enter. You have two years to prepare and if this venture is a success then it may well be adopted by other shows and then the sky is the limit. The important point is that for once, not only can those whose research is treated as "Unimportant" by judges are able to compete and obtain a larger audience for their researches but more importantly Latin America can move towards the higher profile it has deserved for decades. But only if you contribute.

Chile News, which is edited by Professor John West CBE, runs an editorial about the Philatelic Congress of Great Britain this quarter. Typical of this modest and charming man there is no mention that at the Congress earlier this month, John was invited to sign the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists, the pre-eminent honour in International philately. He is now entitled to use the letters RDP after his name as recognition for a lifetime's achievement in philately. To him go our sincere congratulations and the wish that he has many years with which to enjoy this honour. Interestingly it was John who invented the computer hard-drive in the 1950s, here in Manchester at the University where Alan Turing invented the world's first computer. The screen was a British invention too!

On a less important note you will notice that a piece has been lifted out of another journal to fill a page in this. I leave you to work out the significance of that.

mpb

Date for your diary Glasgow 2000 (National), 17-19 November 2000.

EARLY UPU AIRMAIL TARIFFS

by Dr RICHARD H SAUNDRY

All serious students of postal history know that the successful outcome of the British Postal reforms of 1840 instigated by Rowland Hill resulted in cheap uniform postage throughout the British Isles. Uniform low rates where postage depended upon weight of the missive and not on the distance carried (plus encouragement of pre-payment of postage by the sender) resulted in a massive increase in use of the postal system. When the UPU was formed in 1874 this British tried and tested system was now applied to international postage: each member state agreed to exchange mails at a uniform postal rate computed irrespective of the distance carried, and mails in transit through a member country from another third country were forwarded free of further postal charges. This system of international postage rates proved highly successful and during the next forty years or so most countries of the world had become co-signatories of the UPU.

After six intervening Congresses the delayed UPU Congress of Madrid was held from 1 October to 3 November 1920 and which proved highly contentious. As a result of the recent World War a number of new States and postal authorities had been created, each having financial agendas of their own. Many of these recently recruited members of the UPU now lobbied for an increase in postal rates, whereas the older more established countries were striving for a decrease. The resulting compromise provided for both a maximum and a minimum rates tariff within which member country was entitled to fix their own international postage rates. Most importantly from the aerophilatelic point of view was that among the 2200 proposals submitted for consideration at the 1920 Congress one called for international provision to be made for international airmail postage rates. No decision was made at this time.

Apparently the matter of international airmail services was next taken up in 1927 at a special Conference called for the purpose in the Hague. At the Hague Conference, attended by thirty-eight interested postal administrations, fourteen air transport companies, the International Chamber of Commerce, it was agreed that the main purpose of the Conference was to establish:

> *"Cheap and uniform rates, just compensation for the air navigation companies, regular trans-shipment of airmail and a simplified system of international accounting."*

The "low and uniform rate" was set at the postage rate for an ordinary surface letter, plus a surcharge not exceeding 25 centimes (2½d equivalent British currency) per 20 gram weight step carried for a distance of up to 1000 km., with additional charge being levied for mails flown over greater distances and where "extraordinary expenses were incurred". Payment to the carriers was set at 6½ centimes per 100g for each 100 km. flown. Again additional charges were permitted for proven cases of special difficulties.

Importantly all signatories of this resolution (inclusive of all other UPU countries as well?) agreed to accept airmail from all member countries and to include it, wherever possible in their first deliveries after arrival. Administrations without air services of their own were entitled to receive airmails provided they undertook to forward and/or deliver it using the fastest means at their disposal. Apparently the handling of air parcels became the subject of a separate agreement.

Initially it was expected the new agreement could come into effect before the ninth UPU Congress in London in 1929, but most of the member countries were rather slow at implementing those items they had agreed to. For instance Britain reduced its European airmail rates by 1d.

When the UPU met in London (May/June 1929) it was decided to create one consolidated airmail rate (instead of surface rate plus an airmail surcharge). Most European countries implemented this change by the required date, 1 July 1930, but we note that the British Post Office did not effect the adoption of combined airmail rates to destinations outside Europe until 23 February 1931. Thus the airmail rate from Britain to Costa Rica (inaugurated April 1930) of 1/3d per ½ oz. plus the foreign first class letter rate of 2½d = 1/5½d was changed after February 1931 to a flat 1/3d per ½ oz.. (In 1931, of course, there was no transatlantic airmail service and the British airmail rate to Costa Rica, and other Central American destinations was computed on the basis of a steamer journey to New York, and O.A.T. (Onward Air Transport [or Transmission]).

The discerning collector will also note that in dealing with most airmail rates they tended to be computed using 15g rather than 20g weight steps since 15g is a reasonably close approximation to the non-metric ½ oz. Weight step favoured by the United States and British postal authorities. Thus the important date that aerophilatelists should bear in mind in 1 July 1930 when technically, if not in practice, all members of the UPU countries were expected to implement the new changes. Introduction of an agreed international airmail system obviated going down a similar complicated route that pertained before the establishment of the UPU in 1874 when international postage rates were derived by an immense number of complicated individual postal treaties.

This roughly speaking is what I understand of how the international airmail system was agreed. Obviously from time to time inflation and the introduction of new aircraft resulted in modification of the agreed rate schedules, in particular the eleventh UPU Congress held in Buenos Aires April 1939 when a general reduction of rates of 20% was agreed but never implemented because of the outbreak of WWII. From May 1840 (ironically the very centenary of Rowland Hill's low uniform postage rates) Britain had to increase its airmail rates by 20% because of the war. Nevertheless the framework hammered out in the 1920s is still in us today for calculating international airmail tariffs.

Interestingly the rate schedules introduced 1 July 1930 seem not to have been generally commemorated, but with one exception which falls fairly and squarely into our area of interest, the airmails of Central America. Mexico was rather late in signing the necessary postal agreement with Pan American Airways for the US carriers to accept Mexican airmails.

From 1 June 1930 mails were first flown by PAA to destinations in Central or South America (mails were already flown from Mexico to the USA and to Cuba and Guatemala) and such first flight covers received a special first flight cachet (it is not unusual to find this same cachet erroneously applied to philatelically inspired Mexican covers addressed to destinations in the USA) (Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Mexico City to the United States. 1 June 1930. Arrived the next day.

One month later, 1 July 1930, when the international airmail system was supposed to come into force and Mexican air letters to countries such as those in Europe could be expected to be eligible for onwards air transmission, Mexico applied a special "First Flight" cachet to air mail envelopes. Initially intended to be struck only on letters going northwards, especially to countries outwith the Americas, this special "commemorative" cachet seems to have been used rather indiscriminately and one sometimes finds examples used on airmail letters addressed to destinations in South America.

Figure 2. 1 July 1930. Air registered cover to England. Passed through PARIS GARE DU NORD – AVION 10 July.

This illustrated cachet (Figure 2) is clearly worded "Correos Mexico / Inauguracion Servicio Postal Aereo Internacional" with in the clouds "Europa / Asia / Africa y Oceanica / 1^{O} DE JULIO 1930" celebrating the direct exchange of airmail letters with the rest of the world. As far as I am aware Mexico was the only country that marked this important new airmail agreement. From this date any properly franked airmail covers arriving in Europe by steamer from Mexico, or for that matter from practically anywhere else in Central or South America was expected to be forwarded by air to other countries in Europe without attracting additional airmail postage i.e. you could expect to send a letter at the same rate from Nicaragua to Paris or to Prague.

FORGERIES OF THE 1910 SURCHARGES

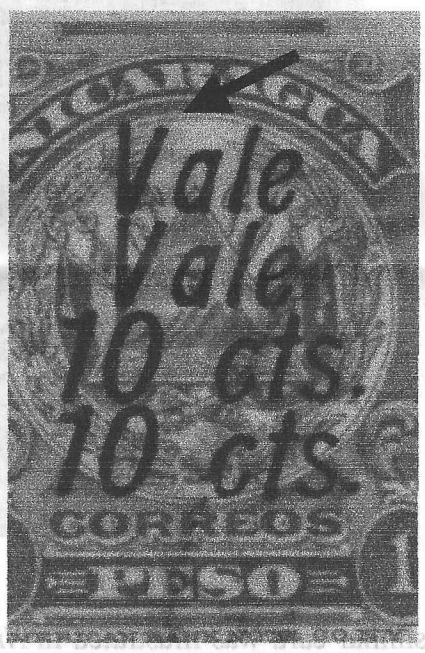
by MICHAEL P BIRKS FRPSL

Looking recently at some examples of the 1910 overprints on the American Bank Note "Arms" type I noticed that one of them had the word "COUNTERFEIT" stamped on the back with no further explanation. This stamp is illustrated below left.

Careful comparison of the surcharge with a genuine example (centre) shows up some interesting differences. The genuine surcharge contains shaped letters i.e. the "0" of "10" is thinner at the top than the sides, the "s" of "cts." has slight swellings at the ends of the letter and other letters show similar shaping characteristics. None of these characteristics are present on the forged overprint which consists of letters of uniform thickness and shape.

Forgery: "0" of uniform thickness

Genuine: "0" thinner at top
Both strokes of "V" same height.



Forgery: Right upright of "V" shorter.

Further examination of these stamps has yielded what I also believe to be another forgery (illustrated right). The letters are much better shaped but are still not quite right. They appear to be slightly wider than the genuine but this is not the main identifying characteristic. The main difference here lies with the letter "V".

In the genuine surcharge the top of two strokes of the "V" and the top of the "l" are aligned; not so with the forgery. In the forged surcharge the right upright stroke of the "V" is significantly shorter that the left.

I have not considered whether the surcharge is over the postmark or under it; whether these are philatelic or postal forgeries. What is clear is that even cheap stamps can be found forged.

ALMOST A ZEPPELIN

by MICHAEL P BIRKS FRPSL

A recent purchase of a card prepared for the 1st South American flight of the Graf Zeppelin led me to question the status of these cards, of which several are known. There is no doubt in my mind that it was the intention to have these cards flown and indeed they were in Havana on the day the airship was due, ready to be collected and forwarded.

A similar card was illustrated in *Nicarao* (Vol.7, No.4, p19). It was registered No.340 and sold for $400 and was virtually identical with the one above which cost me £14 (which is a good price for a genuine used example of the 50 centavos Momotombo airmail on cover, I feel). The dealer who sold me it was not convinced it was flown. It has none of the cachets associated with Zeppelin flights.

Knowing nothing about the Zeppelin flights I wrote to Cheryl Ganz of the American Airmail Society who was most helpful in this matter and whose cover is illustrated on the next page.

She tells me that whilst the Graf Zeppelin was intending landing in Havana bad weather prevented it doing so. Mail for Cuba continued on to Lakehurst and was then forwarded but some of the mail forwarded to Lakehurst from Cuba for the flight to Germany did not arrive on time – some did and one such cover is the one illustrated on the next page.

The cards are missing both the diamond shaped flight cachet and the Friedrichshafen arrival mark which is the clue but knowing the airship did not land at Havana is the clincher. **Caveat emptor**.

Cheryl Ganz collection

SOMOZA'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

from BILL PARMENTER

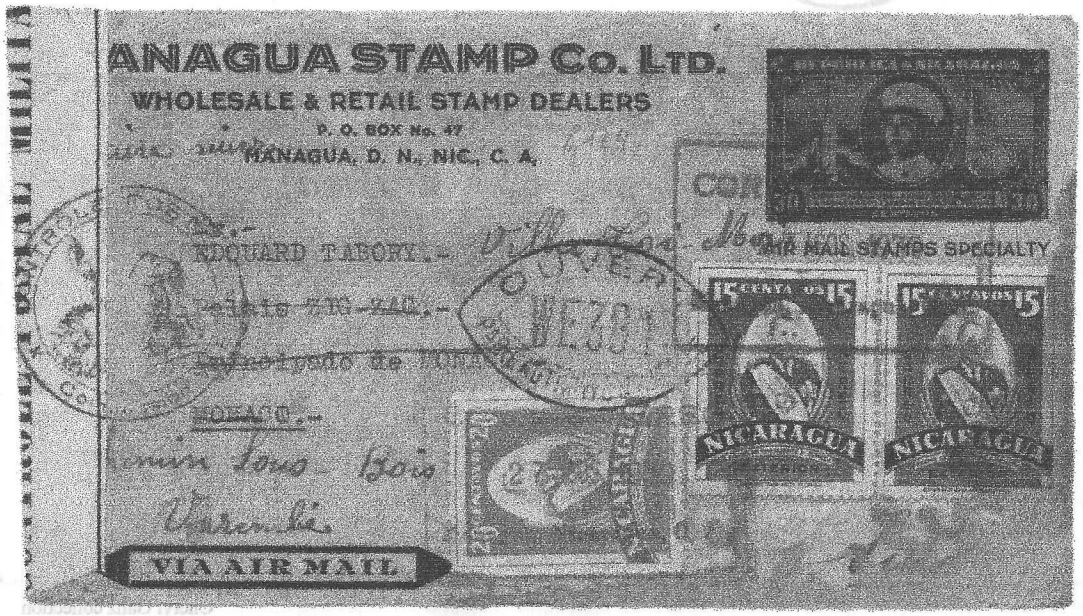
Scott's Monthly Journal for August 1940 reported a little known fact about one of the stamps issued to celebrate President Somoza's visit to Washington (to beg for money).

The 65 centavos value is one of several inscribed "El Presidente A. Somoza ante el Senado Americano Mayo, 1939. Buenos Vecinos". (*President A. Somoza before the American Senate, May 1939. Good Neighbours.)*

The error lies in the word "Senado", for on the stamps President Somoza is depicted making his address not in the Senate Chamber but in the Hall of Representatives.

It appears that the Nicaraguan President addressed the American Houses of Congress separately, and that the wrong photograph was handed to the American Bank Note Company, who engraved the stamps. Several characteristics indicate the error – (a) the Mace, which is clearly visible on its marble pedestal beneath the dash to the left of the word "Correo"; (b) the rows of seats – Senators sit not on benches but at individual desks; (c) the desk in the center is clearly that of the Speaker and not the Vice-President and (d) there are three steps leading to the Speaker's desk but only two to the Vice-President's chair.

Another of the stamps in this set was used by the Managua Stamp Co. Ltd. as their logo. Having no postal validity but appearing in every respect as a postage stamp, this 30 centavos impression would not have been permitted in most countries – Ed.

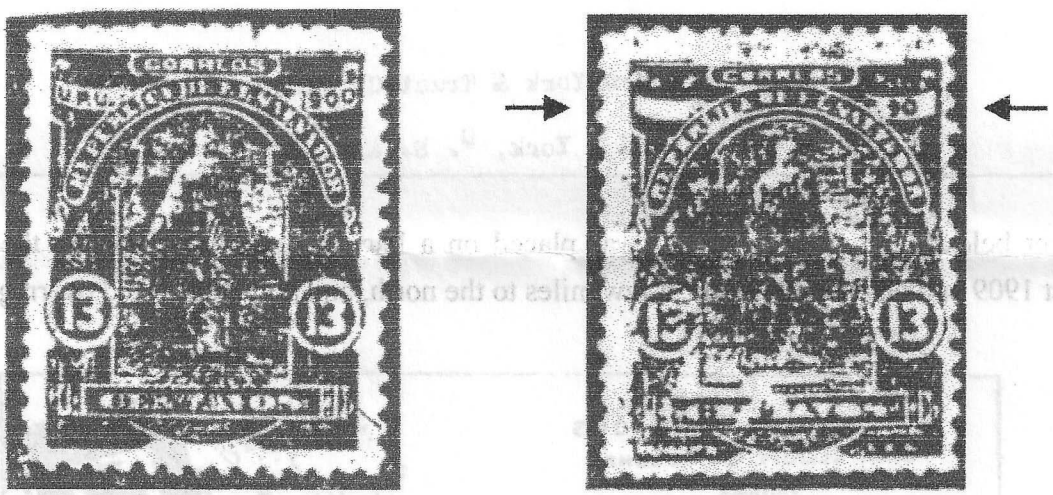


EL SALVADOR: AN UNLISTED VARIETY

by HARRY EISENSTEIN

You may already know about this general issue, but let me refresh your memory. It was released in September 1900, the second "CERES" issue and printed by lithography. This is a type of issue of 1899 but now inscribed "REPUBLICA DE EL SALVADOR" and dated "1900" and in new colours. The stamps are handstamped with the Small Seal in violet or black.

The 1 centavo is blue-green, 2 centavos rose, 3 centavos grey-black, 5 centavos pale blue, 5 centavos dark blue, 10 centavos deep blue, 12 centavos yellow-green, 13 centavos yellow-brown, 24 centavos grey, 26 centavos yellow-brown and 50 centavos rose-red. The issue was perforated 12 and was not issued without the overprint.



Normal Variety

I have come across the following variety which I think is unique; it is the 13 centavos stamp, yellow-brown, inscribed "CORREOS" at the top. The second top line has "UPU" at the left and "1900" at the right. This copy, illustrated above right, has the "UPU" missing from the left and is missing the first and last numerals from the date 1900, so that it reads " 90 " only. The handstamp is in violet.

This variety has not been listed before.

This article is reprinted from *El Faro* Vol.16, No.3, p20 under the reciprocal arrangement between Latin American journals.

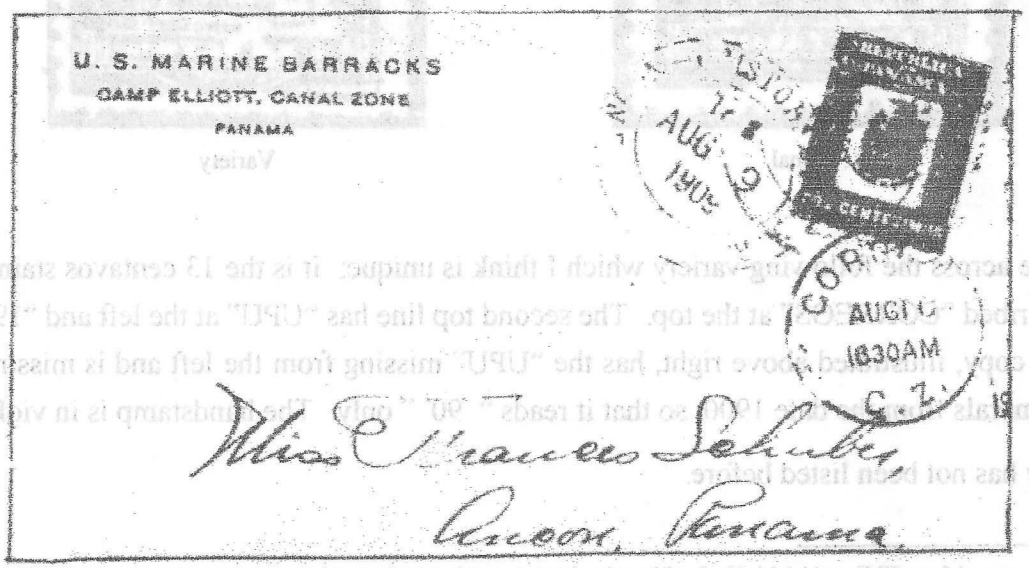
The series "Mails Across the Isthmus 1840-1955" is concluded on the following pages. I have been shown the original publication (after the pages were printed) which clearly indicates that it was produced by the Springfield Stamp Club of Springfield, Virginia, in 1984, whom I now acknowledge. There is no mention of an author. The additional illustrations were provided by Dr Richard Saundry, to whom I express my gratitude.

MAILS ACROSS THE ISTHMUS 1840-1955 - Part 7

from an unknown source

Later the ship's name was included as an integral part of the cancellation. In this 1923 voyage the ship was the *SS Ancon* – the sister ship of the *Colon*. *Ancon* made the first official transit of the Panama Canal on 15 August 1914.

The cover below is a strange one. It was placed on a Pacific Rail Road train on the evening of 9 August 1909 and taken to Gorgona, a few miles to the north, and apparently held overnight.

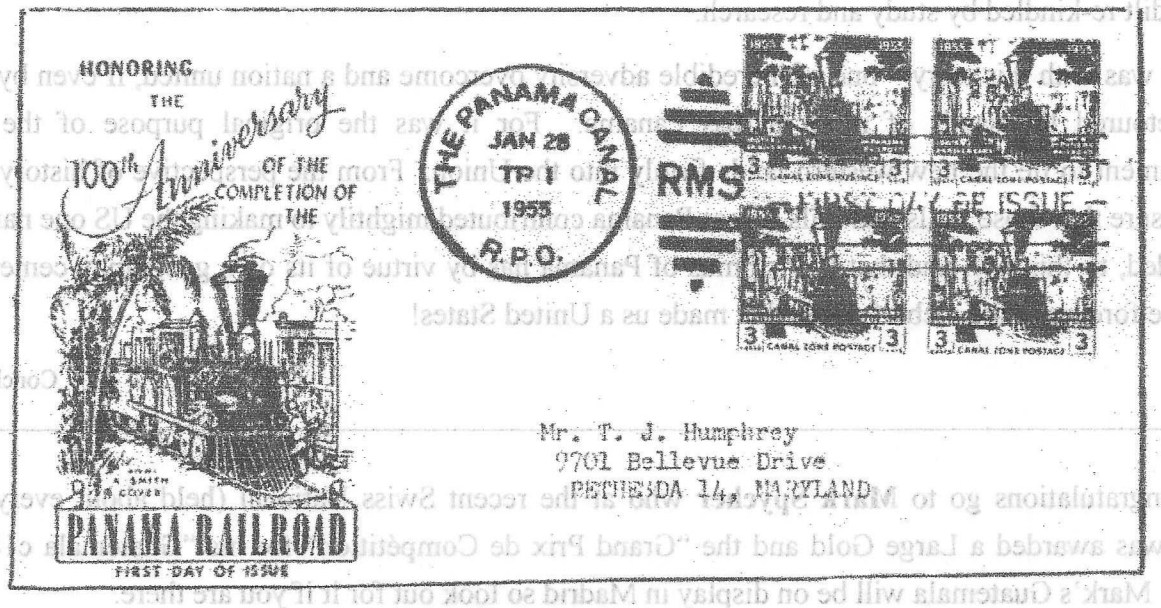


It was placed on the early morning train destined for the southern terminus at Panama City. There it was offloaded and carried a few hundred yards to the Ancon Post Office for delivery.

Gone but not forgotten was the RMS and the role of the railroad in moving the mails. However the 100th anniversary of the railroad was coming up on 28 January 1955, and so one last fling was authorized to help mark that date.

A million 3¢ stamps were printed at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington, DC, using a century-old woodcut of a PRR train as model. Because this particular centennial had become a tremendous civic event in the Canal Zone it was decided to re-establish the RMS for one last time. And so, on the 28th the Senior postal employee was pressed into service as a Railway Mail Clerk. He was kept busy in the mail car, on a special sixteen car train, canceling the thousands of first day covers carried aboard that last trip. Nearly 200,000 stamps were sold that day so first day covers are still quite common and cachets by a variety of makers are collected today. The hullabaloo of the first century over the PRR settled back to carrying passengers and freight.

An interesting combination of usages. Placed aboard a PRR mail car at a branch station along the line and carried to Cristobal. From there a Pan-American Clipper carried it to the US.



First Day Cover of the 100th Anniversary Stamp.

On 30 September 1979 the PRR ran its last train under the aegis of the Canal Zone and under US managership. On the following day it became El Ferrocarril de Panama, a Panamanian government entity. Today it is a victim of the times with declining numbers of passengers and a decaying road bed, rolling stock, and prospects for the future. Nor is it a mail train. The APO mail in the former Canal Zone is carried to and fro from the various offices by US Air Force panel trucks and Panamanian mails also use the highways.

PRR 125th Anniversary FDC issued by Panama in 1980. Cachet by Isthmian Collectors Club of Balboa, Panama (CZ). The cover depicts a 1906 PRR engine and the coats of arms of the PRR and the Ferrocarril de Panama.

However, the travails of 1984 are only of passing interest to most stamp collectors who like to dwell on the past. The past is indeed alive on the Isthmus and the memories of how it was, although fading, are readilt re-kindled by study and research.

Such it was with this story – one of incredible adversity overcome and a nation united, if even by ties that detoured thousands of miles across Panama. For it was the original purpose of the US Government to tie the new western lands firmly into the Union. From the perspective of history, we can be sure that those trails and rails across Panama contributed mightily to making the US one nation, undivided, to this day, and that the Isthmus of Panama has by virtue of its own geography cemented its place forever in the web of deeds that made us a United States!

Concluded

Our congratulations go to **Mark Spycher** who at the recent Swiss National (held about every six years) was awarded a Large Gold and the "Grand Prix de Compétition" for his "Guatemala c1800-1881". Mark's Guatemala will be on display in Madrid so look out for it if you are there.